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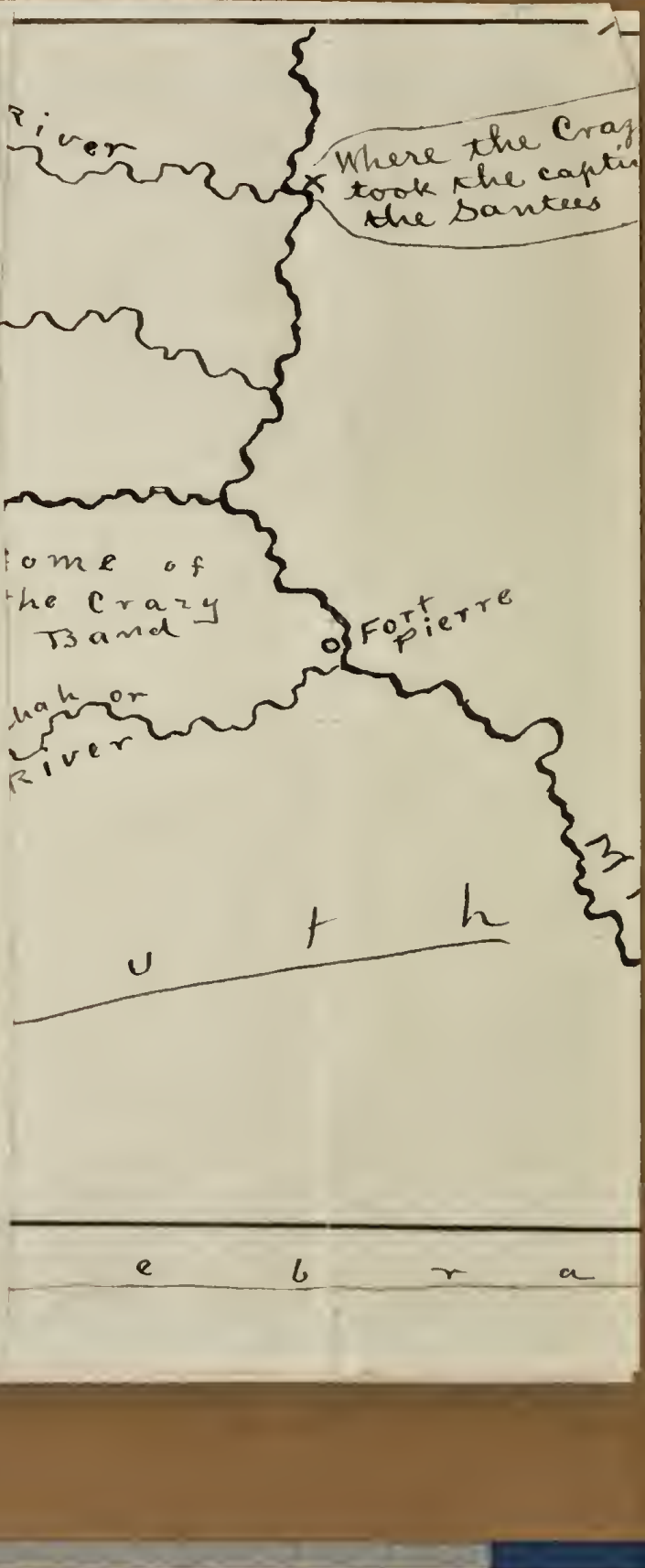
THE
Battle of Birch Coulée

an Address

BY ROBERT K. BOYD.

January 1925.

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THE
Battle of Birch Coulée

A wounded man's description of a battle with the Indians.

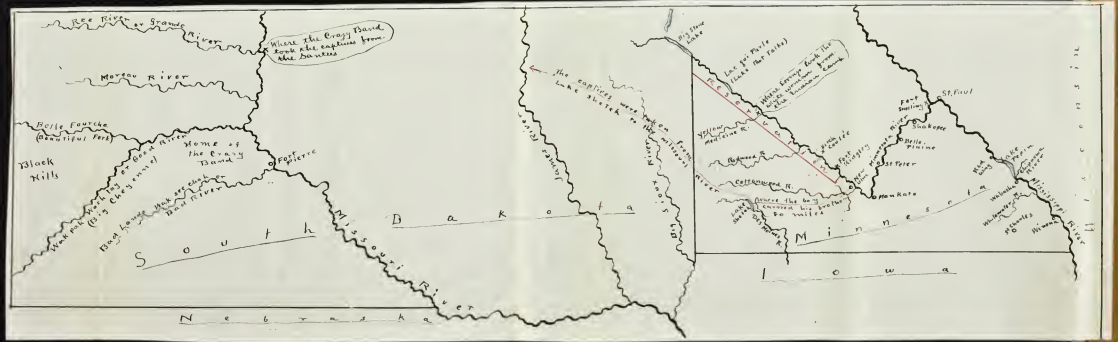
BY ROBERT K. BOYD.

An address given at a meeting of the Sons of Veterans at Eau Claire, Wisconsin in January 1925.

This battle was fought on Sept. 2nd and 3rd 1862 in Renville County, Minnesota. It was the hardest Indian battle ever fought in the West up to that time; being before General Forsythe's battle with the Cheyennes under Chief Roman Nose in 1864, and before the Custer Massacre in 1876.

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Robert K. Boyd
October 1925.


Red River or Grande River
Where the Crazy Band took that captive from that Journey
Marcou River
Belle Fourche (Beautiful Fork)
Black Hills
Home of the Crazy Band
Fort Pierre
Bad Lands (Big Clay Country)
Bad River
South Dakota
South Missouri River
Nebraska
The captives were taken to Lake Shetek
Lake Shetek
Big Stone Lake
Leg per Mille (Lead the Fight)
Where George took the captives from Chief Tamaza's Camp
Yellow Medicine R.
Redwood R.
Cottonwood R.
Redwood Agency
Yellow Medicine Agency
Fort Snelling
St. Paul
Stockade
Belle Prairie
Fort Ripley
Where the boy recovered his brother's scalp
New Ulm
Minnesota
Minnesota River
Mississippi River
Wisconsin
Iowa

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INTRODUCTION.

I came here to tell you of some of the events that took place in Minnesota a long time ago. I believe that you want to understand me, and in order to do this I shall ask you to forget for the time all that you know of the conditions of the present age. I want you to put out of your minds all knowledge of the progress which the world has made during the last seventy years.

I want you to feel that you are living in those early times under the conditions which I will describe, and then you are to listen to me as if I were telling you the news of the day. I do not have the time, and I hardly believe that you have the patience for a continuous story, but I will throw upon the screen as we might say, one picture and then another, of the events that took place during my early life and mostly connected with my own experience.

EARLY CONDITIONS IN MINNESOTA.

First I will ask you to look at what is now the state of Minnesota in the year 1853, eight years before the civil war and nine years before the Indian war in which I was engaged when a boy.

The Chippewa Indians had their home in the northeastern part of Minnesota — all a timber country. The Sioux, or more properly, the Dakota Indians occupied the prairie country, the southern and western part, having their villages mostly on the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, extending south to the region lying between Winona and La Crosse where their country joined that of the Winnebagoes.

The present site of the City of Winona was held by the Chief Wabashaw and his powerful band. Wabashaw was a hereditary chief, a man of more than usual ability and of high character. He did all he could to induce his people to adopt the habits of civilization and this in spite of the fact that four of his own relatives had been murdered by white men. #

The Dakota nation of Indians held the whole prairie country extending from the Mississippi westward to the Rocky Mountains, including the region of the Black Hills. St. Paul was a frontier town supported by the fur trade and there were a few soldiers at Fort Snelling six miles above but there were no other white men in Minnesota except a few traders mostly along the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. This was in 1853 and at that time Minnesota was indeed a wild country.

In the year 1853 a treaty was brought into effect, by which the Sioux or Dakota Indians had signed away all their lands in Minnesota except a small reservation on the headwaters of the Minnesota River, a tract ten miles wide and about one hundred miles long.

After this treaty the Indian villages along the Mississippi River were abandoned and many white settlers came into the country. I came with my people from Illinois in the spring of 1856, and was then eleven years old.

We had been four weeks on the road with ox-teams, and took up land near St. Charles about twenty-five miles west of Winona.

The Indians were to be paid for their lands, partly in goods and supplies, and partly in money to be given them year by year.

But when the Indian sells his land by a treaty made at the point of the bayonet, the result is always the same; the white trader grows rich, the Indian has lost his land and becomes poorer than before.

CONDITIONS IN 1861 AND 1862.

Our next view of Minnesota will be eight years after this, in 1861 at the beginning of the civil war. There were many white people at this time in the eastern part of the state and some settlements had been made as far west as Mankato and New Ulm, about half way across the state.

See Heards History of the Sioux War p 48

Southern and western Minnesota is largely a prairie country, but with groves of timber along the streams, and in the more sheltered places which have escaped the prairie fires.

IN 1861 AND 1862. RUNNING AWAY TO ENLIST.

Now remember that we are looking at Minnesota in the year 1861. The country is mostly wild, but there are small farms here and there with houses mostly built of logs. There are no barns, but the cattle are sheltered in sheds made of rails or rough poles, banked up and covered with wild hay or straw.

You will see men plowing in the fields or driving on the roads, but mostly with ox teams.

It was in the spring of 1861. I was a boy sixteen years old and was with others older than myself at a little schoolhouse where men were enlisting under Lincoln's first call for troops.

There was great excitement then, the people were deeply in earnest and some eloquent speeches were made. There were some who believed that the trouble would be over in a few months, but others were in fear that we were to have a long, hard war. But neither of these opinions troubled me; my only fear was that the war would be over before I could get into it, for of course I wanted to go. I was only sixteen, two years under the lawful age, and I knew that my people would be against my going at any time, but still I wanted to go. I did not say much about going into the army but I did a fine lot of thinking, and a few days after this just as a feeler, I said in a rather lofty way that if they didn't get soldiers enough and came around for more I should go, but this announcement was greeted with a "horse laugh", if you will pardon a little slang; and if you could see me now as I appeared then you would not be surprised at the laugh for I certainly didn't look much like a soldier.

During the summer a young man, a neighbor of ours, named Hiram Harding came home from the battle of Bull Run with a bullet wound in his arm. We all gathered around to hear his story, and wished that we might have been with him and shared in the danger and excitement of the battle. To my mind there was no jewel so bright as an honorable scar, but I did not dream that during the year after this I would be wearing a surplus of that kind of jewelry.

Time passed on, it was in the spring of 1862, and as an Indian would say my war paint was on. I thought of battles all day and dreamed of them all night and remember saying to a chum that if the war went on and I didn't see my share of it, I should hate myself all my life. I believe now that I told the truth.

One night in June 1862, an uncouth country boy of seventeen was making his way through a wild country with only the north star for his guide. He was poorly dressed and without money; he had never eaten a meal in a hotel

or been away from home over night except at the near neigbors.

I shall never forget the time when I came to the deep valley of the Whitewater River, as I climed down the rocky sidehill in almost total darkness, then forded the roaring stream and climbed to the top of the opposite bluff, at least three hundred feet in height. I ate my first meal at least fifty miles from home and making my way to St. Paul enlisted in the army for three years. Now I am at Fort Snelling wearing the army blue. Some boys at this age are manly and command the respect of those who are older, but I had no such advantage as this. In some respects I was behind others of my age and had always played with boys younger than myself. I felt most at ease with boys or men of low intelligence and avoided those who were above me in appearance and manners.

And so I drilled and did guard duty when I had to, and passed the time away through July and the early part of August. Others kept their clothing as good as new, but my uniform became mussy, soiled and nearly worn out, for I swam in the river and climbed the sidehill for chokecherries and prickly gooseberries. regardless of clothing discipline or anything else. Now let us look again at Minnesota and see it as it was in 1862.

The Sioux or Dakota Indians were a much wilder tribe than their neighbors the Chippewas, but they had never fought against white men, and the settlers near the reservation did not fear them in the least.

The Indian while at peace and in his daily life is quiet in his ways and never speaks a harsh word even while he is holding a feeling of resentment; and for this reason there are many who deal with him for years without knowing that there is another side to his character.

There were also a large number of people of mixed blood known as halfbreeds, descendants of the early French fur traders and explorers. They lived mostly along the border land of the Indian country; they were all expert horsemen and could speak the Indian language as well as French and English. It was seldom that a halfbreed would follow any steady employment but as scouts and explorers in a wild country no better men could be found.

ST. PAUL IN 1862.

Now let us speak of St. Paul as it was in August 1862. It was a place of only a few thousand people and was then as now the capitol of the state.

If you were on the principal street of St. Paul you would see the recruiting officer's sign calling for men to enlist in the army. You would see army officers with their showy uniforms and might wonder why they were not at the front, but they were here, walking on the streets or smoking around the hotels. You would see men in groups discussing the events of the time, telling how and why this battle or that had been lost or won. You might see a young man

in faded army blue, whose pale face and unsteady step told that he had come back from the front weakened by wounds or disease. You would often see a man or woman whose coarse black hair, heavier features and darker face, told of part Indian blood, but in other respects St. Paul was like any quiet town of its size at the present day.

THE GATHERING STORM.

But unseen by all, a dark cloud was rising in the west. The Indian believed now that the time had come when he could drive back the hated white man; the white man who had robbed the Indian of his land, cut down the Indian's trees and killed the Indian's game. The white man whose cruel God had driven the good spirits of the Dakotas far back to the wild country of the west.

Their young men had been sent to the south and would all be killed; their God had now grown feeble and weak and could never again help them win their battles. Again would the Indians plant their cornfields at Red Wing's village at the head of Lake Pepin. Again would they lead their children to the dizzy height of Maiden Rock and tell them of the beautiful Wenonah, how she sang her death song, then made her wild leap and fell dead on the rocks below, rather than break her word with the one she loved.

The Indian was a savage, and his rule of warfare was that of the savage of every race and in every age.

As the white man would kill the she wolf with all her brood, so the Indian would kill the white woman with all her children. Repulsive as this seems to us now, if we will read the history of our own race in the ages of the past, we shall have little reason to boast.

In the early history of New England the white people exterminated the whole tribe of Pequot Indians, killing men, women and children without a word of protest from any white man of that age so far as we can learn from the histories written by themselves. And this was done by the Puritans, who were under the direct control of the Christian church; in their own record they called it "the divine slaughter." #

And now in 1862 the white settlers of Minnesota slept in their little homes with no word of warning of the wild storm of death that was to sweep like a tornado over the whole western frontier.

THE OUTBREAK.

On the 19th of August in one of the streets of St. Paul the sound of a running horse was heard, then a loud yell and a horseman went by like the wind. The horse was white with foam and the rider was seated on a beaded buckskin saddle; his head was bare and he wore only moccasins, trouser and flannel shirt. When he saw people in the street ahead he gave that yell again and waved his arms that they should clear the way. The rider was well known in St. Paul and as he passed by the people said "It is Bill

Winchells Life of John Winthrop - p 171

Quinn there is some trouble". So it was, William Quinn a halfbreed, a buffalo hunter and scout and the most noted horseman of all the northwestern frontier. He was a handsome man, almost as dark as an Indian, but with fine features and a bright intelligent face. He was a man of powerful frame with the perfect form of an athlete.

On and on he rode, that yell resounding through the streets. When he reached the higher ground known as St. Anthony Hill, he came in sight of the residence of the Governor; then in a voice that rang far and wide he shouted the Governor's name and gave the Indian whoop which is a demand for attention; this attention call being used at that time on the frontier by Indians and white men alike.

"Governor Ramsey, Governor Ramsey Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho" The Governor and others came to meet him and as he approached he threw himself back in the saddle, and the horse trained in buffalo hunting, struck the ground with braced legs and stood like a statue of iron. He drew a paper from his belt and gave it to the governor; "a dispatch from Major Galbraith, the Indian agent; the Indians are at war and are killing all the white people in the west." Before night other couriers came in bearing the same news. Every frontier town was filled with refugees; every road leading in from the west was crowded with people unarmed destitute and frenzied with fear. Men, women and children by hundreds were being killed and at night from Iowa to the Red River of the North, the whole western sky was lighted up by the flames of burning homes.

Telegrams were sent to the War Department saying that the soldiers of Minnesota must stay and defend their own homes; the city was placed under martial law; guns and ammunition were taken from the hardware stores; horses were taken from stables and teams and wagons from the streets. Many of the people had relatives in the Indian country at the trading posts and at the government stations, and some of these were of part Indian blood. No one knew what news might come by another day or where the trouble would end; and there was many a man and many a woman in St. Paul who went without sleep that night

A courier brought the news to us at Fort Snelling and we spent the evening and the night drawing blankets and accoutrements, handling supplies and getting ready to go to the seat of war.

GOING WEST TO MEET THE INDIANS.

Next morning we were crowded on board a small steamboat and spent the day going to the southwest up the Minnesota River toward the seat of war. That night we reached Shakopee a small town which a few years before had been an Indian town known as Shakopee's village. Next day we reached Belle Plaine and then marched to St. Peter where we had to wait for several days for better guns, the first guns issued to us being found to be worthless.

We reached Fort Ridgley about ten days after the outbreak, and relieved the worn out garrison who had been

besieged during the whole time and had fought two hard battles. We found the roofs of the buildings covered with earth to protect them from the blazing fire arrows of the Indians. We stayed here a few days waiting for more troops and supplies. There were many refugees in the fort, some of them halfbreeds and they had little to eat. I took a liking to the half wild people and stole crackers and sugar from the mess tent, to give to some halfbreed boys and make chums of them to learn a little of their language. I soon learned a few of the most common words and could count up to ten.

On Sunday the last day of August at the morning roll call we had strict orders not to leave the camp ground and shortly after breakfast the drum beat for us to fall in. I was usually somewhere else, but in one respect I was very reliable and they knew what to depend on; they knew better than to waste any time looking for me where I ought to be. That time I was down on the sidehill climbing a tree to get some wild grapes, for of course the grapes at the top of the tree were better than those within reach. You can see that I still had the small boy's appetite for such delicacies as green apples, sour grapes, alum and orange peelings. I got down out of that burr oak tree a lot faster than I had gone up, and ran across the bit of prairie with a bunch of grapes in my hand and joined the ranks at the extreme left, my regular place, the foot of the class.

An officer said to me, "you are detailed; report to Captain Grant of Company A with your gun and accoutrements". I obeyed orders and was made one of a burial party of twenty men, who were to go into the country of the enemy with a party of about one hundred and fifty men in all. The expedition was made up of Company A of my regiment the Sixth Minnesota, a few cavalrymen from St. Paul, some teamsters, and a few halfbreed scouts, members of a company called the Renville Rangers, named in honor of Joseph Renville a halfbreed missionary who had spent his life with these people of the frontier. We of the burial party were furnished with spades, but were told to keep our guns loaded and close at hand.

BURYING THE DEAD.

We were soon on the road to Redwood Ferry the place of the first battle. The first victim that we found had been shot with arrows, and we soon found others who had been killed and mutilated. The bodies had lain two weeks in warm weather, and some good men were overcome and compelled to quit after having done their best. I was vain and peculiar in some respects and wanted others to think that nothing could shock me, that I had no nerves and no emotions, and that I never got tired. So during the whole day I pushed myself to the front and did the work that was hardest and most repulsive. At the battle ground of Redwood Ferry we buried twenty-three and at night camped near where the village of Morton is now located.

That evening while in camp, Captain Grant riding on

his horse, beckoned to me and I approached giving the usual salute. He asked my name and company and said he would speak to my captain about me. I was slow to understand and thought he was about to censure me for something and the blood came hot to my face. But he said he had watched me at my work, that I had done more than my share and he wished he had more such men in his command. I was embarrassed but told him I would always try to do the best I could. He rode on and I turned away, changed for the time from a boy into a man. His words had sobered me for to my mind this was the first real compliment that I had ever received. I walked alone and resolved that from that time on I would do my best in whatever place my duty called me. I had never cared for the good opinion of others and especially of those who were above me, but now I felt a desire to gain the esteem of my officers by every means in my power. I would do guard duty and drill, I would march and I would work, and if a battle came I would fight regardless of danger and I would do all this to the very limit of my strength and endurance.

Little did Captain Grant or I dream of what was in store for us at the next camp ground. I was to be disabled for life and in early manhood thrown upon the world with no future before me, so far as I could see, but a life of hopeless poverty; and he, an officer far above me, although but slightly wounded in the battle was to suffer a misfortune far greater than mine.

Thankful to this day for the few good words that he gave me, I have always held for him a feeling of the deepest sympathy. He was a brave, honest, well meaning officer but by an error of judgment he made a fatal mistake. By taking the advice of one who was above him in rank and of greater age and experience, but incompetent to advise him, he was doomed to go down in history with a cloud upon his name as being to blame for a great disaster.

During the next day we went up the valley of the Minnesota River to Beaver Creek, burying many bodies and rescuing a woman who had been wounded and had lived fourteen days in the woods, after seeing her husband killed and her house burned. In burying the dead I worked as faithfully as before, but more from a sense of duty and with less of egotism than on the previous day.

During these two days our scouts had ridden many miles up the river and visited the deserted villages of Shakopee and Little Crow. The halfbreeds examined the tracks of the horses and the ground where bones and fragments of food had been left by the Indians. When asked how long it had been since the Indians had left, they said, "we think four days." "Where do you think they have gone?" "We don't know". "Don't you think they have all gone west to the buffalo country?" "They might do that". "Could you follow their tracks?" "Yes but it would be slow; they would scatter out and follow the ridges where the ground is hard and the grass is short, and make false tracks to leave a slow trail." Then Captain Grant's guide

and adviser advanced the theory that the Indians had become frightened by the white troops coming into the country, and had gone west to the James River with their plunder and prisoners. This was a man who had been a trader and Indian agent and held the rank of major, but he proved to be entirely ignorant of what the Indians would do in time of war. He had dealt with them all his life and considered them a quiet, harmless people. If our scouts had gone five miles farther they would have come to a camp of more than a thousand Indians. At the close of the second day we camped on the prairie near a narrow valley called Birch Coulee, where water and fuel were close at hand, after burying more than eighty victims in all.

I shall not tell you of all that I saw during those two days; the story is older than history and it is always the same. When a poor ignorant defrauded and downtrodden people rise in their wrath, woe to the helpless ones who fall into their power.

THE DANGEROUS CAMP GROUND.

Our wagons were placed end to end in the form of a horseshoe with the tents inside, and a groups of about ninety horses completed the inclosure. I was thoughtless and paid little attention to the possible danger, but others more deeply impressed were in fear of an attack. Our commander knew nothing of Indian warfare, but trusted to the guide who was above him in rank, had been prominent in public affairs, and had for many years been in contact with the Indians. When some of our men showed signs of fear he told them that they were just as safe as if they were in their own homes. The halfbreeds were nervous and uneasy, and some of our officers said they considered them cowardly. These people did not say much to the white men and at this time felt under suspision for some of them a few days before had gone over to the enemy. The ties of kinship are strong with these people and with the Indians, and when they believed their relatives were in danger they were tempted to desert and give them warning.

And so we made our camp with no protection from the enemy, and the penalty for this mistake was a terrible one for the whole party and for the officer in command. During that year and the next when our forces met the Indians in many a battle, never again did they camp in the country of the enemy without a line of earthworks encircling the grounds. No matter how hard the march had been or how hot the day, this work must be done before any man could sleep, and many a time did the officers say, "we know it is hard work boys but remember Birch Coulee."

Our officers had as they thought, examined all the surrounding country with their field glasses and seen no sign of the enemy. Little did they know that far away on the horizon beyond the sight of the white man, the trained eye of the Indian could see the gathering signal that would call him to the fight, the broken column of smoke by day, the fire arrows at night.

With the exception of a few halfbreed scouts such mounted men as we had with us came on untrained farmers horses. Little did our officers know how swift the Indian courier would ride, how like a whirlwind the warriors would gather for the battle. We went into our tents and slept while five hundred well armed warriors surrounded our camp, making their way in the grass as near to the pickets as they could without giving an alarm and then lying motionless, with such patience as only an Indian has, waiting for the morning light which should be the signal for the opening battle.

THE BATTLE.

We slept in what was known as the Sibley tent, made in the form of the Indian tepee and each holding from fifteen to twenty men. I was thoughtful enough not to take off my belts but left them loose around me so that I could sleep. Next morning at about daybreak I was awake when a rifle shot rang out on the morning air. Every man in the tent sprang up and as the sound of the gun died away an answering volley came. In an instant all was confusion; the roar of guns, the cries of wounded men, the shouts of officers, the yells of Indians, and the plunging of wounded horses filled the air.

I had sprung to my knees, hooked my belt into place and with my left hand on the ground was reaching for my gun. A knapsack was thrown against the gun and as I was recovering my grasp, a bullet struck me in the face. It was a violent heavy blow under my right eye and in my cheek, and was fololwed by a numb prickly unnatural feeling through the right side of my face. My first thought was of my eye, and I was glad that it was not ruined. I followed the men as they were going out of the tent, but a man fell in front of me and I turned back. Then I heard an officer say "Lie low there, lie low all, of you close to the ground; take good aim before you shoot"; then I heard bullets cracking through the canvas of the tent. I dropped to the ground and then thought I ought to get my gun and do what I could. At the thought of picking up my gun I felt that my right arm was useless. Then I felt blood running down my side and a dull heavy pain in my shoulder, and saw a large bullet hole in my blouse below my collar bone. I cannot remember things in their order and think my mind must have left me for a time for it came to me afterward like a dream that I ran from one tent to another, and at one time I was standing up and they told me to lie down or I would be shot again, but the words seemed to have no meaning; then somebody pulled me and I lay down. I was back in the tent again and once came near being crushed by a wounded horse. I had a large sharp knife and by using my teeth managed to open it. I expected every minute that the Indians would be in the camp to kill us all, and thought perhaps I could kill one with my knife by lying as if dead. During this time my mind was clear, and I felt no excitement and no fear as we commonly understand it, for I had no hope of escape and my mind was

made up that we would all be killed. I had a picture in my mind as to how the Indians would look as they came in, half naked and in their war paint, and how our men would meet them in a hand to hand figh; and I had a feeling of curiosity rather than of fear. When the firing was slack I cut a hole in the tent to see out, and saw men digging in the tough prairie sod, mostly with knives and bayonets, scraping out the loosened earth with mess pans and tin dishes, and piling it up for protection.

After this I was out of the tent again and saw men turning wagons down on their sides to make a better protection, and some were placing the bodies of men on the low earthworks to stop bullets.

Then I was back again in the tent; the firing became worse and I was shot again in my right thigh and have carried the bullet all my life. I was struck by two spent balls which did not go through my clothing and felt the wind from bullets a great many times as they passed near my face.

Other wounded men were in the tent with me and a man came with a little water and part of a raw cabbage. I had one swallow of water and a piece of cabbage the size my three fingers; this was my share of all there was to divide.

The chiefs would often give commands to the Indians and these were interpreted by the halfbreeds. They had strong clear voices, the words were distinctly spoken and the commands showed intelligence. Nothing was said in these orders that would be of any advantage for us to know. One Indian had a voice different from the others, and not like any that I ever heard. It was a very strong voice, loud, clear and distinct, but musical deep and mellow like the lower tones of a flute.

I remember one of the commands and will give it in English: "Ho-ho-ho Wacouta, Wacouta, go with twenty men, join Shoon kah skah's band, they have a better place; go in the grass, don't let the white men see."

It would seem strange that in this condition I would think of anything like a joke, but it comes to my mind as plain as if it were yesterday, that I had heard that the Indians were decreasing and dying out. I thought if I got out of that place alive, I could tell them that I had been where there were Indians enough to suit me and some to spare.

Just before night the surgeon came and took the bullet out of my shoulder. It had gone in from the front, broken my collar bone and passed through the shoulder blade, lodging in a mass of broken bones in the back of my shoulder. Now I hope you will allow me to speak a little more of myself. Almost every boy has a streak of the original savage in his nature, but I believe I had a little more than my share. My dream of the future had always been to live in a wild country and be an uncouth hero from 'way back, and I had tried to grow into this state of perfection. I must admit that I was a woefully weak imitation of the

kind of fellow that I wanted to be, but in one thing I did succeed. At school I had often let the others push a pin or even the point of a knife into my arm and pretend that it did not hurt, and would laugh if their nerve failed and say that it hurt them more than it did me. I thought of this now, for the time had come which would show how much of this was real fortitude, and how much the foolish vanity of a boy.

I had been bleeding all day in four places was suffering from hunger and thirst and must have been weak and in no condition to stand much more. You might think that I would hold my breath and set my muscles to resist the pain as long as possible, and then perhaps give way to the pain and suffering. But instead of this I lay on the ground with every nerve and muscle relaxed, not even taking a deeper breath, and let him cut, and with his pliers pull the bullet out from the fragments of bone.

The doctor was surprised that I showed no signs of pain and asked if it did not hurt, and I answered in a careless way, "yes a little". From this time on I took pride in not giving way to pain or suffering, and afterward when in the hospital while this wound was being dressed ,and fragments of bone were pulled out of the flesh which was torn and bleeding, although I have had everything turn dark before my eyes I never allowed myself to flinch from the pain. I have held to this all my life and always tried to ignore pain or discomfort, and this faculty has helped me through many hard places. I will speak again of the battle. While the surgeon was with me a volley came just over our heads and he was as quick as myself to lie flat to the ground. In this tent there were more than a hundred bullet holes at the close of the battle. Night came at last and the tent was filled with wounded men. The firing was more irregular but there was an occasional volley all through the night.

The wounded were crowded thickly in the tent and there was great suffering from pain and thirst. A boy of about my own age lying at my head died during the night. The most pitiful case is seemed to me, was poor Henry Rouleau a young halfbreed. His people brought him into the tent and were talking to him in French. One of us asked him how he was hurt, and he said: "In my eye, right in my head, I'll have to die now; I never thought my mother's people would kill me". He lay against me at my right side and in the night a bullet crashed through his hand with the most terrible sound that I ever heard. Then he cried like a child but afterward fell into a stupor and died a few days after the battle.

In the night the Indians had a fire in the distance and this seemed to be a gathering place. Louis Faribault (pronounced Faribo) a halfbreed went by himself to learn what he could by listening to the Indians. On his return he said, "Captain I think you will have hard fighting again in the morning. There are more Indians coming in; they are of the northern bands. I have heard them give the Sis-

seton yell." Each band has its own gathering cry like the slogan of the Scottish clans. The Sissetons and Wahpetons were two northern bands not connected with the first outbreak, but some of their young men joined the Indians of the Lower Agency who had commenced the war. Sisseton means Village in the Meadow, Wahpeton, Village in the Woods.

During the night a man volunteered to ride through the Indian lines and carry a message to Fort Ridgley asking for help. This was James Auge' (pronounced O zhay) a man of French descent, the leading interpreter and well acquainted with the Indians. He was a frontiersman of the highest type and from boyhood had followed a life of hardship and adventure on the border land of the Indian country. Captain Grant directed some men to look through the corral of ninety horses and see if a suitable one could be found. They succeeded in finding one, but before they could bring it out another volley was fired and the last good horse was killed. This attempt would have been almost certain death but he was willing to take the risk.

Morning came with the Indians in still greater numbers, but the earthworks made during the night gave us some protection and only a few men were hit on the second day.

Our ammunition was nearly gone and no one was allowed to fire except a few who were guarding the most dangerous lines of approach. Each man had an extra gun by taking those of the killed and wounded.

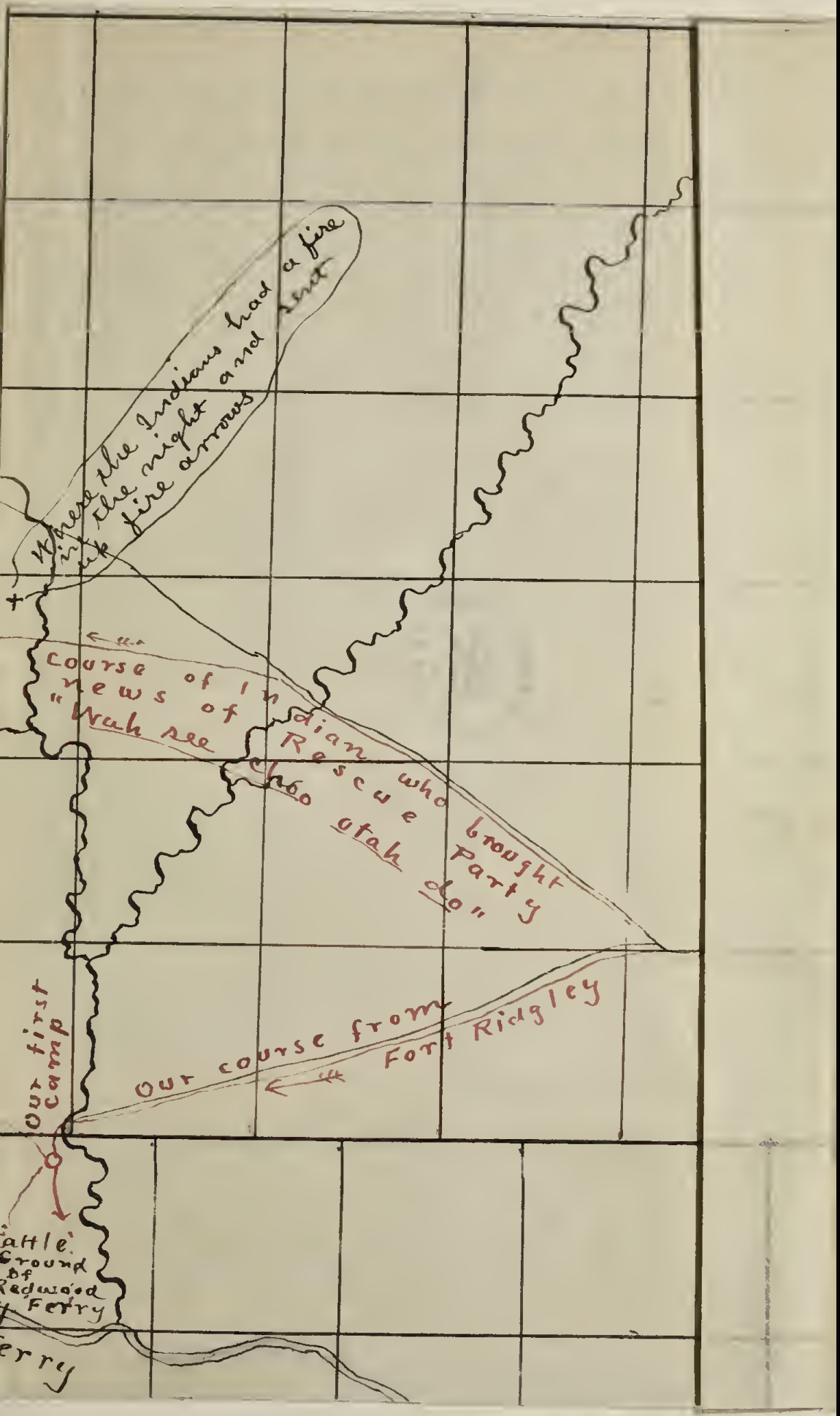
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Captain Grant asked the halfbreeds "What do you people say?" They talked together in the Indian language and answered, "We will tell them the halfbreeds are just like the white men, we all came here to fight; if they think they can whip us what makes them stay so far away"? Captain Grant said "Yes, tell them that and tell them to come and fight us."

HELP AT LAST.

It was nearly noon when the Indians commenced gathering into groups and horsemen were seen riding from band to band. We thought they were going to make a charge, but an Indian came in sight waving his blanket and brought good news for us. I had learned a few words of their language and before it was interpreted understood the last two words, "wah-see-choo otah-do." Wah-see-choo is white man, otah-do a great many. Our officers were still in fear of a charge and every man was ordered to stay at his post and watch the enemy.

At last a column of soldiers came in sight but no signs of life were shown in our camp until the officers rode up


Where the Indians had a fire in the night and sent up fire arrows
Course of Indian who brought news of Rescue Party
"Wuh see Choo utah do"
Our first Camp
Our course from Fort Ridgley
Battle Ground of Redwood Ferry
Ferry

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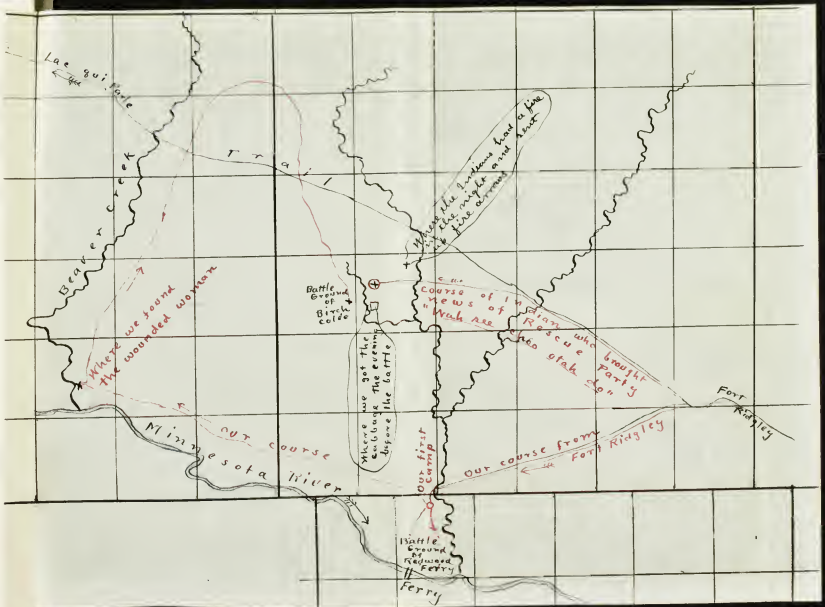
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to our little earthworks, and then the sad remnant of poor band sent up a cheer.

Of our party thirteen lay dead, ten mortally wounded, and more than fifty disabled. I was just able to walk by balancing myself for each step; my cheek was torn open so that my thumb would easily lie in the opening and I was covered with blood and dirt. My right eye was closed, and my right hand and arm hung useless by my side, black and gorged with blood. My company stood in line and as I passed by no one knew me until I asked. "Boys did you ever see me before?" then one of them answered "It is Bob Boyd".

The dead were buried, the wounded given such care as was possible, and I with other wounded rode sixteen miles to Fort Ridgley, after dark in a farm wagon over the rough prairie ground.

There are some who might expect me to describe the outrages committed by the most desperate and depraved of these Indians but I shall not do so. We would not judge our own race by the acts of the criminals who are all too plenty in our own country.

Most of the outrages were committed by the Farmer Indians who had been in contact with a class of white men whose influence was only to drag them down. They were few in number but totally depraved, like maniacs turned loose. The wilder Indians fought us in battle but committed no murders.

I came here to tell you a story of war but not a story of crimes; I would rather speak of brave men and generous deeds.

THE STORY OF LORENZO THE INDIAN.

About twenty-five years before the massacre of 1862 the Sisseton band of the Dakota Indians had their villages on Big Stone Lake near the headwaters of the Minnesota River. Through the influence of some missionaries a small boy of this band was sent east to the white mans school and given the name of Lorenzo Lawrence. He was taught to speak the white man's language, to read and to write, but there was one thing that he could not learn. The Great Spirit, Wakan Tonka, had made him an Indian, but he did not make of him such an Indian as could be taught to live in the white man's way.

He went back to his people, grew up to manhood, married a woman of his tribe who could not speak a word of English and for many years lived the life of a hunter. With his family and mother he was in the camp of the Indians on the Yellow Medicine River at the time of the battle of Birch Coulee. He had planned to go to the western limits of the hunting grounds of his own band, the Sissetons, where he and his family could live in peace and safety. But in this camp there was a prisoner, Mrs. De Camp a white woman, and Lorenzo's wife had taken her into her own tepee for protection. The Indians in revenge threatened to kill

them all and fired through the tepee at night, but Lorenzo had built up earthworks inside and kept his people below the level of the ground.

He then decided that he would take the white woman with his own family and go to Fort Ridgley. His aged mother said to him "I know you are brave; go and save the white woman and I will go alone to my people". The next day by stratagem he got the white woman and his family out of the camp and they were hidden for many hours in a swamp standing in the water waiting for him to join them. But he was being held as a prisoner in the camp until he escaped with only his knife, having given up his gun to bribe an Indian guard. He joined his people and his wife gave the white woman half of her blanket and blackened her face and hair with mud from the swamp to disguise her the best she could.

They commenced the perlious journey of sixty miles to Fort Ridgley, and for two days were without food when they killed a cow and ate raw meat for they were afraid to build a fire. But the Indians had taken an oath of vengeance and tried to head them off and kill the whole party. On the third day Lorenzo was walking ahead through the tall grass with his dog by his side, and came to six hostile Indians in war paint lying asleep, each with his gun by his side. Lorenzo drew his knife and signalled the others to stop, but saw the hair rising on his dog's back. With a powerful grip he pressed the dogs jaws together and killed him with one stroke of the knife, then lifting his body in the air to avoid the noise of a struggle, he went back in silence on the trail. I saw them at Fort Ridley about a week after I was wounded. After the war I became acquainted with Lorenzo and asked him if the story of killing the dog was true. He said, "Yes and I have always felt bad about it; some think an Indian has no feelings, but my dog was like one of my family.

He was a man of great courage and iron nerve, the best hunter I ever saw and I have seen a good many; his aim was like a flash and when his gun spoke something fell dead. He lived a long and useful life, was always true to his best principles, and was honored and beloved by Indians and white men alike. In his own little world he was truly a great man. In saving this white woman and restoring her to her friends, no truer knight of chivalry ever risked his life to save the weak and helpless, and the name of Lorenzo the Indian should have equal place on the roll of honor with those who have achieved undying fame.

Among the many tragedies of the Indian war was the story of the nine year old hero of Lake Shetek.

NINE YEAR OLD HERO OF LAKE SHETEK.

Far to the west near the head of the Des Moines River a few people lived on the shores of lovely Lake Shetek. No thought of danger had ever broken in upon their peaceful lives. Among them like a whirlwind came those wild

chiefs, Lean Bear and White Lodge with their savage bands. Little Merton Eastlick, a boy of less than ten years, dragged his baby brother to a thicket and lay in breathless fear till all was still again. Then they were alone, with no parents, no home and no friends. What could they do and where should they go? They only knew that from the east the wagons had always come, and that no white men lived farther to the west.

They started on the eastern trail, with the despairing thought that somewhere there might be white men still alive. And how far did they go? How far could they go without food, without shelter from the heat of day or the chilling blasts of night? How long could human strength hold out? How far could little Merton Eastlick carry his baby brother, at a time when wild storms of rain and wind swept over that desolate plain?

Day after day, did they pass the sites of ruined homes and corpses by the roadside blackening in the sun. Night after night through storm and darkness, did they crouch in deadly fear of savage beasts and still more savage men. Along that lonely trail for eighty miles did those children go before they saw a living white man's face. Those children saved at last have grown past middle age, for many years have passed, and farm and school and village deck the plains where then the painted warriors rode.

The Indian of that day if living now sits crouched within his tepee, sullen and defiant, mourning for the days gone by. To his fathers he leaves the dark record of vengeance and of wrath, the memory of crimes untold; and to his fathers he leaves the dauntless heart, the proud spirit of defiance, the halo of romance that surrounds the warrior's life.

UNSELFISH HEROISM OF THE WILD INDIAN.

In March 1863 six months after the battle I was discharged from the army on account of my wounds and went back to my old home near St. Charles.

During the summer a little girl was brought to our house after having been a prisoner with the Indians.

The facts related in the "Story of the Crazy Band" were learned in part from her and partly from the published report of those who visited the band of those who rescued her and her sister and delivered them and other captives to the soldiers at Fort Randall on the Missouri River. While seven of the original eleven of the "Crazy Band" were still living a full account of their heroic work was made up by reliable historians who interviewed each of them and wrote the details of their respective stories. This was written up and published in 1902 by Mr. Doane Robinson, now at the head of the Department of History of South Dakota.

These young Indians never blackened their first record; they became civilized, lived in good homes, and used their influence for the good of their people.

The story as written here may be relied upon as histori-

From a magazine "The Dakotan" published in 1902 at Aberdeen South Dakota. Doane Robinson Editor and from correspondence with Mr Robinson, now of the Department of History Pierre S. Dakota.

cally true in every detail. Nothing is enlarged upon, as in the judgment of the writer the plain truth is beyond the dreams of fiction.

These boys were members of a wild band entirely unschooled and beyond the influence of missionaries or teachers of any kind. Men of high standing who know all the conditions, have claimed that in the whole history of the world if we consider the early influences and surroundings of these young men it would be hard to find another case of such unselfish heroism and self sacrifice.

THE STORY OF THE CRAZY BAND.

There was a band of the Teton branch of the Dakota Indians, living between the Missouri River and the Black Hills, on the Wakpah Washtay, or Good River, which came from the mountains and the water was clear and cool; but this river was known to the white men as the Big Cheyenne.

Their hunting grounds included the Wakpah Seechah or Bad River, three days march to the south; this river came from the Bad Lands and the water was strong with minerals. These people lived in peace except when they met their old enemies the Rees who had their villages on the Missouri River five days march to the north.

In their country there was plenty of game, buffalo, elk deer and antelope; the flesh and skins of these animals furnished them with food and clothing, and their tepees or lodges were made of buffalo skin tanned like buckskin. They had knives axes and kettles which they got from the white traders and a few of them had guns, but they hunted mostly with arrows and spears.

There were a few trading posts near their country and they knew that on the Missouri River there were white soldiers whom they called Esah Tonkah or Big Knives. But late in the fall of 1862 they heard that on the east side of the Missouri, three days ride to the north, there had come from the east across the plains a band of about one hundred and eighty people of their own nation, called the Santees or Knife People. The Santees had been at war with the white people of Minnesota and had with them two white women and six little girls whom they held as slaves. It was common with the wild Indians of that time to capture the women and children of their enemies and hold them in slavery.

They had some wagons loaded with plunder, blankets and cloth of gay colors, and a great wealth of beads and ornaments. The Santees were boastful and quarrelsome; they wore their war paint all the time and held war dances every night. They said they were the only Indians who dared to fight the Big Knives; that they had conquered the white men and taken their property away.

But bad stories were being told of the Santees, and the Tetons learned that they were not brave warriors but only murderers and thieves, and that they were very cruel to the little white girls. In a war dance one of the Santees had worn a white woman's garment stained with blood, and

boasted that he would always keep it to prove that he was brave and said the blood should never be washed out.

Then eleven boys of the Tetons, all under twenty years of age, built a tepee wakon or sacred lodge, where they could hold councils by themselves and make plans for the future. Their names translated into English were as follows: Charger, Kills and Comes, Four Bears, Swift Bird, Mad Bear, Pretty Bear, One Rib, Strikes Fire, Sitting Bear Red Dog and Charging Dog. They called themselves the "Young Men's Band" and bound themselves with a solemn pledge that they would get the prisoners away from the Santees and deliver them to the Big Knives and ask them to send them back to their people.

When this plan became known the older Indians ridiculed them and said, "If you are brave put on your war paint, go north and fight the Rees, they are our enemies, but do not make trouble between us and a band of our own nation." But disregarding all advice the boys still held to their purpose, and at a council an old warrior said, "You will wear no eagles feathers by doing a foolish thing like that; you are acting like crazy men"; and from that time on all the other Indians called them the "Crazy Band".

When they found that no others would join them they mounted their ponies and crossed to the east side of the Missouri River, and then made the journey to the north and made their camp near the village of the Santees. They asked White Lodge the chief of the Santees to come with his people and meet them in council and built a large council fire. They knew that they could not take the captives by force and now made plans to buy them.

White Lodge came to the council with his braves each with a loaded gun, and they all refused to speak, but waited to hear what the boys would say. Then Charger the head speaker of the Crazy Band addressed the Santees and made a plea for the captives, closing his speech with these words, "You see us here, we are only young boys; our own people call us crazy but we want to do something good; we will buy the white captives and will give them back to their friends. We will give our horses for them, all the horses we have. That proves that we want the captives very much because our hearts are kind and we want to help them go back to their people." Then each of the others addressed the Santees in the same manner, pleading for the women and children.

To this White Lodge answered: "We have come from the east where the sky is made red by the fires that burn the homes of the white men, and where the ground is red with the white man's blood. We will never again be the friends of the white men and they will always be our enemies. We will not give up the captives, we would rather fight till we fall dead." This council broke up, but then the boys took nearly all their provisions and made a feast for the Santees, and Charger said to them, "Here is our food, eat all you want and go home, and we will take the captives and go home." White Lodge and his people ate

the food but when the feast was over he insulted the boys and dared them to interfere in his affairs; then all became excited and there was danger of fighting. After that another council was held and the boys repeated their first offer to give all their horses for the captives but the Santees seemed more stubborn than ever. Then Charger spoke again: "White Lodge you talk brave but you kill white men who have no guns; you steal women and children and run away to where there are no soldiers. Three times we have offered you our horses for the white captives; now we will take the captives and put them on our horses and go home.

If you fight us we have only once to die but the white soldiers from the east and the Tetons from the west will come against you and the blood of the Santees shall go into the ground.

Then a Santee brave who did not sit in the council called out to Black Hawk the son of White Lodge and said, "Black Hawk why do you not speak? why do you sit so still?" Then Black Hawk spoke, "You boys have done right; you are straight young men respected by your own people. I know some of you and know that you have good hearts, but my father White Lodge does not know you; we should give up the captives. I have one white child which I will give up; let others do the same and give up their captives."

Then there was much quarreling among the Santees as to who owned some of the captives, but after much delay and bargaining the captives were bought, all except one woman a Mrs. Wright. White Lodge refused to let her go on any terms and there was more excitement, but the boys threatened again that the Santees would be crushed between the Tetons and the white soldiers, and at last against the protest and threats of White Lodge the Santees took the last remaining horse from the boys and gave up Mrs. Wright the last of the captives. The boys were then more than one hundred miles from home without food or horses and with only four guns, having been compelled to give up most of their guns in trading for the captives. Winter had come and a cold storm was raging; the captives were nearly starved and in a pitiful condition being almost entirely destitute of clothing.

They moved a few miles down river and made a small tepee for the women and children, gave them all their blankets, and then with very little clothing for themselves, marched around the tepee all night to keep from freezing.

The next day they started south and meeting a friendly Indian traded two of their guns for a horse. With two poles they made a travois on which they placed the younger children, and Pretty Bear carried one child. One woman—Mrs. Duly was without shoes or moccasins but Charger gave her his moccasins and marched with bare feet over the frozen ground.

But White Lodge and five warriors followed them and demanded Mrs. Wright, but the boys altho at this time having only two guns, refused to give her up, and after

a long parley drove White Lodge back with his five men.

That day they reached the camp of a friendly band and traded one gun for an old cart, some moccasins and a little food. After this, by the boys pushing on the cart to help the pony, they continued their march. After enduring terrible hardshpips they at last reached a trading post near Fort Pierre and after several weeks delay, the released captives were taken to Minnesota.

Among the prisoners there were two little girls, Rose aged 6 and Ellen aged 4, children of Thomas Ireland of Lake Shetek in western Minnesota. Their mother had been killed and their father wounded in many places and left for dead. On reaching Minnesota there was no home for them together, and they had to live apart and among strangers.

The younger of these girls Ellen Ireland, her Indian name was Wakandatonah, lived for nine years in the house of the mother of the one who writes this story, and is now a resident of Mankato, Minnesota. After delivering the captives to the soldiers, the boys went back to their viliage and the people said, "They have given the captives to the Big Knives and got nothing in return", but during all their lives they were never sorry that they had given their horses to save the women and little girls, although many of their people could not understand why they should be so foolish.

Many years passed by and some white men came to their village to listen to the story as told by themselves and their friends, and in this way we learn how the women and little girls were saved by the Crazy Band.

The writer of this story was wounded in a battle with the Indians twelve days after the little girls had seen their mother killed, and now more than sixty years from that time, when he receives a payment on the pension which is given him on account of his wounds, he sends a part of the money to Wakandatonah who was once a prisoner, and who owed her liberty to the young Indians who risked their lives and gave up all they had, to save her and her sister from a life of slavery.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

On leaving the camp ground at Birch Coulee Col. Sibley wrote a letter to Little Crow, the leader of the hostile Indians and left it on a post inviting him to send a messenger to Fort Ridgley under a flag of truce. After this several letters came from the Indians, one from the Chief Wabashaw who had opposed the outbreak and saved the lives of many white people.

After the battle of Wood Lake, about two weeks after our battle, Sibley followed the Indians and compelled them to give up a large number of women and children held as prisoners. The hostile Indians were led by Little Crow who had been the leader of the Blanket Indians as distinguished from the Farmer Indians who lived on farms and dressed like white men. Little Crow was a grandson of the original Crow who during the war of 1812, had marched with a

party of British from Prairie du Chien to Sandusky, Ohio, where they were defeated by the Americans. He wore a crows skin and feathers on his breast as a badge. Little Crow was a man of some talent and a persuasive speaker, but was drawn into the outbreak against his better judgment.① Like most of the leaders he opposed the killing of women and children, but the less intelligent and lower element of the tribe were entirely beyond control, like maniacs turned loose. Most of the outrages were committed by the Farmer Indians who had been most in contact with the low class of white men who are always around an Indian reservation. It is very easy for an Indian to acquire all the vices of civilization and retain none of the better qualities of his own race. Wabashaw and some other chiefs and leaders of the tribe were men of high character and acted the part of real heroes in protecting the white settlers. Wacouta, a hostile chief who fought against us at Birch Coulee disowned his own son for joining in the murder of white women and children. The Government had been making a clumsy effort to civilize the Indians. Farms were opened up and cultivated, mostly by white labor paid for out of money belonging to the whole tribe. The Blanket Indians who supported themselves mostly by hunting, complained bitterly that their money was used to support the Farmer Indians in idleness. The Indians had known from the first that the whole system was tainted with fraud, but they had no redress even when they had proof that money was stolen from them. They had demanded in vain that treaties should be made on their own ground where the people would be in touch with their chiefs; and they had good reason to believe that the chiefs had been taken to Washington, flattered feasted and bribed into signing papers which they did not understand and which were against the rights of their people. They were never furnished with copies of treaties in their own language, and this could have been easily done, for their language had been reduced to writing; they had some printed books and some who could not understand English could read in their own language. ②

They had asked in vain for statements of account, saying that they were willing to pay all that they owed the traders, but wanted the money that was their own. There were many such instances as the following — all matters of reliable history. A man named Hugh Tyler was paid $55,000.00 out of the money due them for their land for pretended "services and necessary disbursements", and they could not find out who he was or what he claimed to have done. They signed what they believed was a power of attorney for the collection of an old claim which they believed was due them, but it was in fact a receipt for goods to the amount of $12,000 which had never been delivered to them. After our battle when some friendly chiefs advised them to give up their prisoners and make peace, the hostile leaders said they would rather die in battle than die of starvation. ③

① Heard's History 22 pr 114
② " " " 48
③ " " " 41

WHOSE WAS THE RIGHT AND THE WRONG.

After reading anew a reliable history of this Indian war and of the conditions leading up to it, I think the Indians would have been fully justified if they had plundered the agencies and traders stores, destroyed all property on the reservation, and made their way to the buffalo country west of the Missouri. This is what the wilder chiefs would have done if they could have had full control of their young men. In the centennial year 1876, fourteen years after this war, the Custer Massacre took place and Longfellow in his poem "The Revenge of Rain in the Face" writes:

"Whose was the right and the wrong?
Sing it oh funeral song,
With a voice that is full of tears;
And say that our broken faith,
Wrought all this ruin and scathe,
In the year of a hundred years."

But all this is now in the past; the white man has taken for his own what was then the wild country, the land of the buffalo the elk and the antelope. The Indian of this age can be neither a hunter nor a warrior; he must take his place with the white man of low degree and earn his bread by his own labor.

It has been stated by some writers and believed by many that the real Indian is a natural outlaw, that he is sordid, course and low without the least conception of the higher principles of true manhood. It is often said that those writers who have given him credit for some of these higher qualities have put into his language an eloquence of speech a beauty of expression and a display of emotions that are not his own and have built up for him a character of romance and not of fact. But such statements are not only unjust. but to believe them is to deny the teachings of reliable history.

Bishop Whipple of Minnesota who had spent many years in touch with them as an adviser and missionary, writing in 1863 after this war, tells of these words spoken by an old chief, a wild Indian:

"A beautiful bird of all colors came and sang beside the village; a voice said, "Do not listen to him, do not look at his colors". He went away but came again with finer colors and with sweeter songs, till at last we listened to him and he led us away to die. The bird was the Big Knives; his songs were the fair words and lying promises; his colors were the paints and the beads that he gave us for our country. When we listen to the Big Knives that day we go to our graves."

Howe's History p 347.

It would be a great gain to the world if some man of his own race could in fitting terms, tell the story of the Indian from his own standpoint, during the hundred years that has been called by white men "The Century of Dishonor".

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